2007-05826/

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For Immediate Release
2007FOR0031-000286
April 5, 2007

Ministry of Forests and Range
Natural Resources Canada

**SOUTHERN BEETLE COALITION RECEIVES START-UP FUNDING**

MERRITT – The Province and the Government of Canada are providing $50,000 to help establish a group that will lead community-based planning to mitigate the economic impact of mountain pine beetle in the southern Interior, the Honourable Rich Coleman, Minister of Forests and Range, and the Honourable Gary Lunn, Minister of Natural Resources, announced today.

"As part of our Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan, we're providing funding and support for economic development strategies designed by communities," said Minister Coleman. "This $50,000 is seed money for setting up a Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition similar to those already at work in the northern regions."

"We are taking immediate action with our provincial partners to control the spread of the beetle," said Minister Lunn. "Our government is also focusing on the economic infrastructure of communities that have been affected by the infestation. We are committed to new initiatives that will help modernize and rebuild areas in the southern Interior and across the province."

The funding will help identify beetle-related issues and concerns for communities, regional districts and First Nations in the southern Interior, and will assess the epidemic's potential social and economic impacts on the region. Using the results of this analysis, the southern Interior group will prepare a business plan for further funding consideration.

All regional districts and tribal councils in the southern Interior have been invited to participate on the steering committee that is guiding the formation of the Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition. The following organizations have confirmed their participation:

- Central Okanagan Regional District;
- Columbia Shuswap Regional District;
- Community Futures Development Corp. of Central Interior First Nations;
- Kootenay Boundary Regional District;
- Lillooet Tribal Council;
- Nicola Tribal Association;
- North Okanagan Regional District;
- Okanagan Nation Alliance;
- Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District;
- Regional District of Central Kootenay;
- Regional District of East Kootenay;
- Squamish Lillooet Regional District;
- Shuswap Tribal Council; and
- Thompson Nicola Regional District.

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"The expanding infestation is not just a northern problem. Concerned local governments and First Nations across southern B.C. have rallied together to take action," said David Laird, interim chair of the steering committee. "This contribution will help kickstart the preparation of a beetle mitigation plan for the entire region."

The Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition will include the upper parts of the Thompson Nicola Regional District and everything south of Highway 1 and east of Lillooet and Princeton.

This is the third beetle action coalition to receive provincial and federal government funding. The Province and the federal government have also committed funding to the Cariboo-Chilcotin and Omineca regions for community transitions and pine beetle recovery strategies.

Encouraging immediate and long-term economic sustainability for communities is part of the provincial Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan. For more information on the Action Plan, or to download a copy, visit www.gov.bc.ca/pinebeetle.

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